

January 14, 2015

You don't need a visa consultant

Q: *Should I use a visa consultant to help me with my application? I was told I'll get my visa faster if I pay for professional help.*

The short answer is: No.

Although the visa application process may seem daunting at first, with numerous forms to complete and various fees to pay, it is designed to be straightforward and accessible. There is no reason to use a visa consultant and doing so will *not* expedite the visa process. All the forms are available for free, and can be accessed and completed by anyone with basic computing skills. If you are not comfortable using a computer, a close friend or family member who knows how to use a computer is a good person to ask for help.

The Embassy cautions applicants against paying for most professional assistance with visa applications. Many "visa consultants" and "immigration experts" advertising their services make false promises and charge exorbitant amounts to provide a very basic service. Under no circumstances does paying for professional help expedite the application process. There is no "express service," and anyone claiming to possess inside knowledge on how to make the process move faster is lying.

Some travel agencies offer to assist clients with the visa application process for a modest fee. While it is perfectly acceptable to allow your travel agent to assist you with the process, it is certainly not necessary. Be certain that the agent has you complete every question on the form and that you do not include any information that is misleading or incorrect. Whether you do complete your forms yourself or rely on a travel agent, it is of the utmost importance that you verify that all the information is complete and correct. Remember – you are the one legally responsible for the data in your application, no one else.

A visitor's visa application requires the fewest forms and fees: the DS-160 application form and a one-time fee. Immigrant visas require more forms and paperwork, but the necessary documents are still available for free online. U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents who are filing petitions for family members file form I-130. Once the I-130 petition is approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, it is forwarded to the National Visa Center (NVC). U.S. petitioners then file the required Affidavit of Support form (either form I-864, form I-864EZ, or form I-864W). There are detailed instructions available on the website www.travel.state.gov for petitioners who are unsure which Affidavit of Support form to use. Note that for family preference categories, NVC will contact the petitioner when the case's priority date is about to become current; it is at that time that the petitioner will file the Affidavit of Support form.

Whether you are applying for a visitor's visa or an immigrant visa, be wary of organizations that require payment for immigration and visa services. Many of these organizations are fraudulent entities seeking to collect payment for information or forms that are available free of charge on U.S. government websites. Comprehensive information on visas and immigration, as well as all

necessary forms, is available on official U.S. government websites, including www.travel.state.gov and www.uscis.gov.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov and the website of our authorized service provider at <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-jm/niv>. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.